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C O N F I D E N T I A L SECTION 01 OF 02 COLOMBO 000674

SIPDIS

DEPARTMENT FOR D, SA, SA/INS, S/CT; NSC FOR E. MILLARD

LONDON FOR POL/RIEDEL

E.O. 12958: DECL: 04-17-13

TAGS: [PGOV](#) [PREL](#) [PTER](#) [CE](#) [IN](#) [NO](#) [JA](#) [LTTE](#)

SUBJECT: In meeting with Ambassador, key aide reviews President Kumaratunga's recent visit to India

Refs: Colombo 658, and previous

(U) Classified by Ambassador E. Ashley Wills.
Reasons: 1.5 (b, d).

1. (C) SUMMARY: In an April 16 meeting, former FM Kadirgamar provided a readout of President Kumaratunga's recent visit to India. Based on the New Delhi meetings, Kadirgamar said the GoI seemed to want to become more engaged re Sri Lanka. In Chennai, Chief Minister Jayalalitha Jeyaram underscored her deep animus toward the Tigers. Kadirgamar appeared satisfied with the visit. END SUMMARY.

2. (SBU) The Ambassador met April 16 with Lakshman Kadirgamar, a key aide to President Kumaratunga. (Note: Kadirgamar is a former foreign minister and is currently a senior People's Alliance MP.) Kadirgamar, who was on her delegation, provided a brief readout on Kumaratunga's April 7-10 visit to India.

3. (C) NEW DELHI: Kadirgamar said the president met with a panoply of top Indian government officials, including PM Vajpayee, Deputy PM Advani, Minister of External Affairs Sinha, and Finance Minister Singh. Kadirgamar related that the president used the meetings to brief on the status of the peace process. In doing this, he said she expressed overall support for the process, but stressed her concerns re the Liberation Tigers of Tamil Eelam (LTTE).

4. (C) Kadirgamar said the president's interlocutors listened carefully to her comments. Taken as a whole, he thought that the Indian officials appeared much more interested in Sri Lanka during the just concluded visit, as compared with her previous visit to India in early 2002. Kadirgamar said he got the strong feeling that India wanted to get more engaged in Sri Lanka's peace process in some way. That said, GoI officials emphasized that India had no plans to assume a specific role, such as that of peace facilitator or otherwise. Ambassador Wills commented that the U.S. has encouraged India to get more involved regarding Sri Lanka. As the major regional power, it can play a key role in solidifying the process, he noted.

5. (C) While in New Delhi, Kumaratunga also met with Sonia Gandhi, the head of the Congress Party. According to Kadirgamar, Gandhi, who was joined by assistant Natwar Singh, listened intently to Kumaratunga's points re Sri Lanka, but made few comments, preferring to focus her remarks on domestic Indian politics. Gandhi, for example, made no comments re the ultimate fate of LTTE leader V. Prabhakaran should there be a negotiated settlement of the conflict. (Note: Prabhakaran is under indictment in India for the assassination of former PM Rajiv Gandhi in 1991. The GSL received an extradition request for Prabhakaran some years ago.)

6. (C) CHENNAI: Before proceeding to New Delhi, Kumaratunga made a brief stopover to meet with Tamil Nadu Chief Minister Jayalalitha Jeyaram. Kadirgamar indicated that the meeting was very cordial, with an animated Jayalalitha dominating the discussion. The chief minister repeatedly made clear her long-standing animus toward the LTTE and her doubts that the peace process would work because of the group. She expressed deep concern about the detention of Indian fishermen in Sri Lanka, especially by the Tigers. The two also discussed the fate of the approximately 100,000 Sri Lankan Tamil refugees living in India. (Note: Per Reftels, about 300,000 displaced persons have returned to their home areas in Sri Lanka since the start of the peace process, but very few refugees have gone back, so far.)

7. (C) COMMENT: Kadirgamar seemed satisfied with the visit. The president certainly received excellent press coverage back home. This is important for her, as she desperately tries to show that she is still "relevant." Based on what we are hearing, Kumaratunga did not come on strong in her meetings by hitting out hard against

her cohabitation rival, Prime Minister Wickremesinghe, or the Tamil Tigers. (Note: She has reportedly tried the hard-line tack before with Indians and not made much headway with it.) In reporting that India might be aiming to get more engaged, Kadirgamar seemed to think that that meant the GoI would join the president in her skepticism toward the peace process. We're not sure where he may have got that impression, or whether it's a fantasy. END COMMENT.

18. (U) Minimize considered.

WILLS